



Sweden

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
February 25, 2004

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a multiparty parliamentary form of government. The King is head of state, and the Prime Minister, who heads the Cabinet, exercises executive authority. The judiciary is independent.

The Government maintained effective control of the security forces and armed forces. Police provided internal security and the military provided external security. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The country had an advanced industrial economy, mainly market based, with a total population of approximately 8.96 million. Citizens enjoyed a high standard of living, with extensive social welfare services.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provided effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Societal violence against women was a problem. Anti-Semitic crimes and threats against the Muslim community were problems, which the Government took steps to address. Trafficking in women and children was a problem. The Government actively took steps to address these problems.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

The Chief Prosecutor's investigation into the 2000 death of Peter Andersson, who died after his arrest in Orebro, was closed; no one was charged in connection with the death.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

Following an investigation of the 2001 police shooting and wounding of three protesters at the European Union (EU) summit in Gothenburg, the police officer in charge of the police authority in Gothenburg was charged with breach of duty and unlawful deprivation of freedom. The case remained pending at year's end.

Prison conditions generally met international standards. Men and women prisoners were held separately. Juveniles were held separately from adults, and convicted criminals and pretrial detainees were held separately.

The Government permitted visits by independent human rights observers, although there were no such visits during the year. In January, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture made a regular visit as prescribed by the European Convention Against Torture.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions. The law requires warrants for arrests. Police must file charges within 6 hours against persons detained for disturbing the public order or considered dangerous and within 12 hours against those detained on other grounds. Police may hold a person for questioning for 6 hours, although the period may be extended to 12 hours if necessary for the investigation. If the person is a suspect, police must decide whether to arrest or release the person; if the suspect is arrested, the prosecutor has 24 hours (or 3 days in exceptional circumstances) to request detention, and the suspect must then be arraigned within 48 hours. Prosecution begins within 2 weeks, unless extenuating circumstances exist. Detainees routinely were released pending trial unless they were considered dangerous.

The Constitution prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The judicial system is composed of three levels of judicial examination: District courts; a court of appeals; and a Supreme Court. All criminal and civil cases are heard first in district court regardless of the severity of the alleged crime. For some areas there are specialized courts, such as labor, water, real estate, and market courts. These courts usually are the second and last instance for trial after the district court.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Trials are public. Defendants have the right to appeal and are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. The law limits home searches to investigations of major crimes punishable by at least 2 years' imprisonment. In general, the police must obtain court approval for a wiretap and a prosecutor's permission for a search; however, a senior police official may approve a search if time is a critical factor or the case involves a threat to life. The national police and the Prosecutor General's Office submit a report to Parliament each year detailing all of the electronic monitoring done during the previous year.

A proposal for closer regulation of existing methods of investigation and an expansion of those methods was submitted to the Ministry of Justice in August. The proposal aims to facilitate police investigations of more serious crimes and would be used to conduct sting operations, undercover operations, and more extensive searches.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. However, there is a law against hate speech that makes "agitation against ethnic groups" a crime. Under this law, neo-Nazi groups were not permitted to display signs and banners with provocative symbols at their rallies (see Section 5).

An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press, including academic freedom.

The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without government restriction. A quasi-governmental body excised extremely graphic violence from films, television programs, and videos.

The law prohibits the possession and handling of child pornography. It also is illegal to publish or distribute such material.

Internet access was available widely and unrestricted.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. Police require a permit for public demonstrations, but the authorities routinely granted such permits. In the rare instances when permits were denied, the decision was made either to prevent clashes between antagonistic groups or because there were insufficient police resources to patrol an event adequately.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government did not prohibit the practice or teaching of any faith. There is no state church.

Citizens are tolerant of diverse religions practiced in the country; however, the numbers of reported anti-Semitic crimes and tendencies have increased over the past several years. There is also a very small, but sporadically active, fascist and neo-Nazi movement. In April, there was an attempted arson at the purification room of the Jewish cemetery in Malmo. The Government continued to take steps to combat anti-Semitism by increasing awareness of Nazi crimes and the Holocaust.

Since 2001, threats against the Muslim community have increased. In April, the Islamic school and large parts of the Islamic Center in Malmo were destroyed in a fire that police later determined was arson; the police investigation continued at year's end.

In June, the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination brought a case to court of the denial of employment to a woman because she wore a head covering for religious reasons. The case was pending at year's end.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law provides for the granting of refugee status or asylum to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement and granted refugee status or asylum. The Government cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Government also provides temporary protection to some persons who do not qualify as asylees or refugees. The number of asylum seekers decreased slightly: 31,355 persons sought asylum, compared with 33,016 in 2002. Of the total number of asylum seekers, 5,305 were from Serbia and Montenegro, 3,069 from Somalia, and 2,700 from Iraq. The Government approved 5,518 applications during the year. Applications could remain under consideration for long periods of time with applicants in uncertain status. The appeals process in the courts may extend cases for several years, although there were few such cases.

The U.N. Committee Against Torture received 11 new cases against the Government during the year, all of which concerned denial of entry to the country. During the year, the Committee ruled on five cases and found that, in each case, the country had not violated the rights of the petitioners.

The Government expeditiously returned asylum seekers from EU countries or from countries with which there were reciprocal return agreements. In most cases, persons who were returned expeditiously had passed through or had asylum determinations pending in other EU countries. In many cases, asylum seekers were deported within 72 hours of arrival. The Government experimented with pilot programs at selected border crossings to provide expeditious legal assistance, a concern raised by some NGOs.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. Elections to the 349-member unicameral Parliament are held every 4 years; the last elections were held in September 2002.

Women participated actively in the political process and Government. Women constituted 45 percent of the Parliament and 41 percent of the Cabinet. The Parliament included representatives of the principal religious, ethnic, and immigrant groups.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restrictions, investigating and publishing their findings. Government officials were very cooperative and responsive to their views. Several private organizations actively monitored issues such as the effect of social legislation, anti-immigrant or racist activities, and the condition of the indigenous Sami population. Government agencies maintained close contact with a variety of local and international groups working in the country and abroad to improve human rights observance.

The official government ombudsmen may publicize abuses of state authority and initiate actions to rectify such abuses.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution provides for equal rights for all citizens. In July, a law entered into force prohibiting discrimination based on disability, ethnicity, religion, or sexual preference.

Women

Violence against women remained a problem. During the year, 16,758 cases of assault against women (excluding rape) were reported, compared with 21,420 in 2002. Most involved spousal abuse. An average of 30 murders of women and girls are reported each year, half of them by men closely related to the victim. Rape is illegal, and the law does not differentiate between spousal and non-spousal rape. The number of reported rapes of persons over age 14 was 1,851, compared with 1,791 in 2002. The law provides that rape may be prosecuted as sexual assault instead of the more serious crime of rape, based on a determination of the level of resistance offered by the victim. At year's end, the Government was working on legislation that would expand the criminal definition of rape.

The law provides complainants with protection from contact with their abusers. In some cases, authorities helped women obtain new identities and homes. The Government provided electronic alarms or bodyguards for women in extreme danger of assault. Both national and local governments helped fund volunteer groups that provided shelter and other assistance to abused women, and both private and public organizations ran shelters. There was a hot line for victims of crime, and police were trained to deal with violence against women. Authorities apprehended and prosecuted abusers. The typical sentence for abuse is a prison term--14 months on average--or psychiatric treatment. However, women's organizations complained about short sentences and early release of offenders.

In June, the Government allocated approximately \$16 million (128 million SEK) over a 3-year period to provide protected housing for young women vulnerable to honor-related violence from family members. This action was part of the Government's increased focus on honor killings after the 2002 killing of Fadime Sahindal by her father because she refused an arranged marriage. The killing received international attention because Sahindal had publicly charged her father and brother with threatening her life in a 1998 court case in which her father ultimately received a suspended sentence and her brother received probation.

The law specifically prohibits the purchase or attempted purchase of sexual services. Trafficking in women for purposes of sexual exploitation was a problem (see Section 6.f.).

The law prohibits sexual harassment and specifies clearly employers' responsibilities to prevent and, if applicable, to investigate sexual harassment in the workplace and to formulate and post a specific policy and guidelines for the workplace. Employers who do not investigate and intervene against harassment at work may be obliged to pay damages to the victim. As with other forms of discrimination, women and men may file complaints with the courts or their unions.

The law requires employers to treat men and women alike in hiring, promotion, and pay, including equal pay for comparable work. Some sectors of the labor market showed significant gender disparities, many with a strong preponderance of either men or women. In 2001, women's salaries averaged 90 percent of men's salaries, adjusting for age, education, and occupational differences. To combat gender discrimination in the long term, the

Equal Opportunities Act requires employers, in both public and private sectors, actively to promote equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace. The Equal Opportunity Ombudsman, a public official, investigates complaints of gender discrimination in the labor market. Complaints may also be filed with the courts or with the employer, with mediation by the employee's labor union. During the year, 146 cases were registered: Women filed approximately 90 percent, and 50 percent concerned salary issues. The number of discrimination complaints related to pregnancy rose to 30, compared with 10 in 2002.

All employers with more than 10 employees must prepare an annual equality plan, including a survey of pay differences between male and female employees. The equal opportunity Ombudsman reviews these plans. The law requires from every employer a survey made with a union representative analyzing wage differences. If gender is found to be the cause for a difference in salary, pay must be equalized within 3 years.

Children

The Government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it amply funded systems of public education and medical care. An official children's Ombudsman monitored the Government's programs. The Government provided compulsory, free, and universal primary school education for children 9 to 16 years of age. It also provided free medical and dental care for all children up to the age of 16 (19 for dental care). Parents received approximately \$1,300 (10,400 SEK) per year for each child under 16 years of age; the per-child amount increases when there are three children or more.

Public and authorities remained concerned by data indicating an increase in cases of abuse of children over the past several years, although the physical abuse of children appeared relatively uncommon. During the year, there were 7,355 reported cases of abuse of children under the age of 15. In addition to 332 reported cases of rape, there were 1,043 reported cases of sexual abuse of children, compared with 2,700 reported cases of child sexual abuse and 374 reported cases of rape in 2002.

The law prohibits parents or other caretakers from abusing children mentally or physically in any way. Parents, teachers, and other adults are subject to prosecution if they physically punish a child, including slapping or spanking. Children have the right to report such abuses to the police. The usual sentence for such an offense is a fine combined with counseling and monitoring by social workers. However, authorities may remove children from their homes and place them in foster care. Foster parents virtually never received permission to adopt long-term foster children, even in cases where the biological parents were seen as unfit or sought no contact with the child. Critics charged that this policy placed the rights of biological parents over the needs of children for security in permanent family situations.

The Government allocated funds to private organizations concerned with children's rights. An NGO, Children's Rights in Society, offered counseling to troubled youngsters. The Government continued to be active internationally in efforts to prevent child abuse.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination by employers against persons with disabilities in hiring decisions and prohibits universities from discriminating against students with disabilities in making admission decisions. No other specific laws prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities, although considerable efforts were made to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoyed equal opportunities. There was an Ombudsman for Disability Issues.

The Government provides for freedom of access and social support as basic rights for citizens with disabilities. At government direction, a parliamentary committee studied means to improve legal protection against discrimination for persons with disabilities; its report is due in 2004. Regulations for new buildings require full accessibility, but there is no such requirement for existing public buildings, except for certain public entities that are obliged to make their facilities accessible. Many buildings and some public transportation remained inaccessible. Deaf children have the right to education in sign language. The parents of children with disabilities and workers with disabilities under the age of 65 received financial assistance every 7 years to buy a car adapted to the person's disability.

Indigenous People

There were at least 17,000 Sami (formerly known as Lapps and officially recognized in 2000 as a national minority) in the country; Sami organizations placed that number at 25,000 to 30,000. The Sametinget (Sami Parliament) acts as an advisory body to the Government. The Government allocated funding to the Sametinget for the establishment of a national information center for Sami issues to be completed by 2004.

Some Sami stated that they continued to face societal discrimination, especially in the areas of housing and employment and particularly in the southern mountain regions.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Approximately 11 percent of the population is foreign born, with the largest groups from Finland, Iraq, Iran, and the former Yugoslavia. In 2002, there were 2,260 reports of xenophobic crimes, of which 300 were related to neo-Nazism; more recent statistics were unavailable.

Most estimates placed the number of active neo-Nazis, or white supremacists, at fewer than 3,000, and there appeared to be little popular support for their activities or sentiments. The Government investigated and prosecuted race-related crimes, although in many clashes between Swedish and immigrant youth gangs, authorities judged both sides to be at fault. Neo-Nazi groups operated legally, but courts have held that it is illegal to wear xenophobic symbols or racist paraphernalia or to display signs and banners with provocative symbols at rallies.

During the year, several demonstrations against violence and racism were organized throughout the country. The Government supported volunteer groups that opposed racism and xenophobia and allocated funding for projects supporting those who have left neo-Nazi organizations.

The Ombudsman for ethnic discrimination reported 349 complaints of ethnic discrimination in the labor market, compared with 305 such complaints in 2002.

The law recognizes the Sami people, Swedish Finns, Tornedal-Finns, Roma, and Jews as national minorities. The Government supported and protected minority languages. The Council of Europe issued a report during the year that criticized the Government's efforts to protect minority languages. The report expressed particular concern about insufficient education, as well as inadequate translation of laws and other public information.

On June 1, the Living History Forum was established, with a commission from the Government to promote democracy, tolerance, and human rights, with the Holocaust as a starting point. The activity had a budget of \$3.75 million (30 million SEK) for the year.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law entitles workers to form and join unions of their choice, and workers exercised this right. The work force consisted of approximately 4.3 million persons, of which approximately 80 percent were unionized. Unions and employer organizations operated independently of the Government and political parties (although the largest federation of unions has always been linked with the largest political party, the Social Democrats).

The law protects union officials and members from dismissal or reprisals for official union activities.

Unions have the right to affiliate with international bodies. Most unions were affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the European Trade Union Confederation.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law provides for collective bargaining, and workers exercised this right. Framework negotiations between management and labor tend to be productive and nonconfrontational and occur every 2 to 3 years. Framework agreements are signed every year between the parties on the labor market to regulate the wage increase. Most agreements with labor unions provided for a degree of individualized pay, including merit bonuses. A government agency, the National Mediation office, mediated labor disputes to promote an efficient wage formation process.

The law provides both workers and employers with effective mechanisms for resolving complaints. The vast majority of complaints were resolved informally.

The law provides for the right to strike, as well as for employers to organize and to conduct lockouts. During the year, 9 legal and no illegal strikes were reported, involving 80,333 employees and 626,397 workdays. Within limits protecting the public's immediate health and security, public employees also enjoy the right to strike.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law permits full-time employment at age 16 under the supervision of local authorities. Employees under age 18 may work only during the daytime and under supervision. Children as young as 13 years may work parttime or in "light" work with parental permission. Union representatives, police, and public prosecutors effectively enforced these restrictions.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national minimum wage law. Wages were set by collective bargaining contracts every year, which nonunion establishments usually observed as well. Even the lowest-paid workers were able to maintain a decent standard of living for themselves and their families through substantial benefits (such as housing or daycare support) provided by social welfare entitlement programs.

The legal standard workweek is 40 hours or less. Both the law and collective bargaining agreements regulate overtime and rest periods. The law also requires a minimum period of 36 consecutive hours of rest, preferably on weekends, during a period of 7 days. The law also provides employees with a minimum 5 weeks' paid annual leave; labor contracts often provided more, particularly for higher-ranking private sector employees and older public service workers.

Occupational health and safety rules were set by a government-appointed board, the Work Environment Authority, and monitored by trained union stewards, safety ombudsmen, and, occasionally government inspectors. These standards were very high, making workplaces both safe and healthy in general. Safety ombudsmen have the authority to stop unsafe activity immediately and to call in an inspector. An individual also has the right to halt work in dangerous situations to consult a supervisor or safety representative without endangering continued employment.

Unions played an important role in preventing discrimination in the labor market.

The same minimum terms of employment apply to foreign and domestic workers.

f. Trafficking in Persons

A 2002 law prohibits the trafficking of persons for sexual purposes, provides for sentences of 2 to 10 years in prison for persons convicted of trafficking, and criminalizes attempting to traffic, conspiracy to traffic, and the failure to report such crimes; however, trafficking in women and children continued to be a problem.

To prosecute traffickers, law enforcement primarily continued to use laws against procurement and an offense called "placing in distress," which can be used in cases where traffickers lure women from other countries under false pretenses. There were 48 cases of procurement prosecuted during the year, many involving trafficking victims. Traffickers sentenced for procurement faced up to 6 years in prison, but most sentences were for 2 to 3 years.

In October, a court in Gothenburg announced the first convictions under the 2002 law: A woman and her accomplice were sentenced to respective prison terms of 4 years and 2 years for luring two girls, ages 17 and 19, to Copenhagen with promises of work but then forcing them into prostitution.

According to the police, the country remained primarily a trafficking destination, although it also served increasingly as a transit point for women and children. Trafficked women, numbering 200 to 500 per year, came principally from the Baltic countries, Central and Eastern Europe, and Russia; those transiting came primarily from the Baltic region, and the principal destination countries were Spain, Germany, Denmark, and Norway. There have been occasional cases of trafficked women from South America. There were anecdotal police reports that trafficking in children increased during the year.

Women typically were recruited in their own countries to work as cleaners, babysitters, or in similar employment. Once in the country, victims were isolated and intimidated by traffickers and forced to work as prostitutes in hotels, restaurants, massage parlors, or private apartments. Some reportedly were "purchased" from other traffickers and brought into the country. There were reports that traffickers locked women up and confiscated their passports. National Criminal Investigation Department reports indicated that younger women, many of them minors, were subjected to trafficking.

Trafficking victims in general did not receive temporary residence permits; in most cases, they were deported immediately. Victims of trafficking rarely were detained. The Government allocated funds to NGOs for providing shelter to victims and rehabilitation; the police and social services also provided funding. A new legislative proposal will enable trafficking victims to receive temporary residence permits to allow better care for victims and to facilitate police investigations.

The Government did not have a specific program to assist victims. However, the police often worked with private organizations like The Young Women's Shelter to provide housing and treatment to victims. The Government also provided funding to two domestic NGOs, Women's Forum and Women to Women.

The Government has allocated \$3.75 million (30 million SEK) during a 3-year period to enhance anti-trafficking efforts and provided funding to NGOs and international organizations that combat trafficking worldwide. In April, a new strategy was launched within country's international development cooperation programs to combat trafficking. The goal was to address the causes of trafficking by combating poverty and lack of equality in countries that often served as points of origin for trafficking victims.